Living as Oneself, Living as a Human Being

Recently, the phrase “living true to oneself” has been used quite often. On one hand, I feel it is a good expression, yet on the other hand, I cannot fully agree with it—there is something about it that leaves me unsettled.

This is because many people use the phrase “living true to oneself” as an excuse for selfishness and behavior that goes against what it means to live as a human being.

I. Living as a Human Being

More fundamental and more important than living “true to oneself” is living as a human being. We must uphold this. There is no need to listen to those who cry out “I am just being myself” while being selfish, self-centered, and inconsiderate of others.

Those who do not sense—or who sense but ignore—the invisible, noble, majestic, gracious, and pure One, cling to “living true to themselves.” Christians, however, know that the invisible, noble, and gracious One, whom many Japanese feel but do not name, is in fact the Creator of heaven and earth as taught in the Bible. We also understand that this Creator made human beings. We accept that to live according to the will of the One who created us, according to the purpose for which we were created, is to live as human beings. And we know well that when we live according to that purpose, we can be most truly happy.

The purpose for which humans were created is one: to glorify God. This glorifying of God has two dimensions. One concerns our relationship with God. While usually expressed as “loving God,” in Japanese it might be better expressed as revering, adoring, and trusting God. It means recognizing the Creator, and with gratitude and joy, honoring, praising, and trusting Him.

The second dimension is that human beings are to love one another. This means wishing for the happiness of others, rejoicing in their happiness, and living for their happiness. It means seeking peace, creating it, and extending a helping hand to those

in hardship. This is precisely what the Creator who loves humankind desires of us. The One who made humans in His image delights in fellowship with them and rejoices to see them living in mutual love.

Although Japanese people do not know much about this Creator, they still treasure, through the instincts remaining from being made in God's image, a sense of this divine presence. What is unique about the Japanese among the peoples of the world is the strength of this instinct. Thus, even while saying, "There is no such thing as God," the average Japanese person cherishes the faith present in their heart, honors others, and seeks to live peacefully. They try not to be a burden to others and wish to live in a way that benefits others.

II. Living True to Oneself

For those who try to live in this way—who try to live humanly as human beings—the phrase "living true to oneself" does not fit well. Too often, living "true to oneself" becomes living without regard for others, selfishly, even harming others without remorse.

That said, living true to oneself is also very important. But it must be done upon the foundation of living as a human being created by God. Every human being is unique; there are no two people exactly alike. Each is different, possessing distinct characteristics. The Creator did not make us to be uniform, like parts of a machine within society. He made us different so that we might live by using our distinctive features.

However, this must always be within the purpose of the Creator—within a life of revering the Creator and loving others. No matter how much we express our individuality, we must never live in ways that defile the glory of the Creator. We must not live in ways that diminish the happiness of others.

Today, people speak of "coming out," and men acting like women or women living as men are increasingly accepted in society. More and more countries even recognize same-sex marriage. When such situations arise from genuine difficulties related to one's sexuality, of course we must affirm the dignity of that person and support them to live happily. But when it is merely a matter of preference, to erase or alter the

distinction between male and female is to go against the Creator's basic design for humanity.

It is important, for example, to build a society in which even those who cannot help stealing because of a disability are not discriminated against. But to create a society that accepts theft itself is wrong. Much less should society permit the self-justification of thieves who do not have such a disability.

As Christians, let us hold firmly to the principle that we were made in the image of our Creator. Let us not step off the path of being truly human, but live while making the most of our God-given uniqueness.